

MINUTES OF THE
Task Force on Learning Standards and Accountability in Public Education
September 25, 2000 -8:30 a.m. - Room 223 State Capitol

Members Present:

Sen. Howard A Stephenson, Chair
Rep. Jeff Alexander, Chair
Sen. Karen Hale
Sen. L. Steven Poulton
Rep. Loraine Pace
Rep. Karen W. Morgan
Rep. LaWanna "Lou" Shurtliff
Rep. John Swallow
Jill Kennedy
Kim Burningham
Linda B. Ogden
Ila Rose Fife

Members Excused:

Lt. Gov. Olene S. Walker

Staff Present:

Mr. Bryant R. Howe, Research
Analyst
Mr. James Wilson, Associate General
Counsel
Ms. Wendy Bangerter, Legislative
Secretary

Note: A list of others present and a copy of materials distributed in the meeting are on file in the Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel.

1. Task Force Business –

Sen. Stephenson called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

MOTION: Linda Ogden made several technical amendments to the minutes of September 11, 2000. She moved to approve the minutes as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Review of Reporting Options to Show School and School District Data Indicators Over Time – Mr. Bryant Howe, Research Analyst, distributed and reviewed school and school district report prototypes displaying school performance data for more than one year. The reporting formats for the direct writing assessment scores were also reviewed. On the secondary level report, a language arts test will be added as that test is fully implemented, as well as other data indicators.

Sen. Stephenson stated that this gives the lower scoring schools more opportunity to show how they are making gains. Rep. Pace pointed out that even higher achieving schools have lower achieving students.

Dr. Barbara Lawrence, State Office of Education, explained that you could diagonally consider classes from year to year on the prototype report and calculate point changes for the same cohort of students, assuming there is little mobility. The horizontal comparison is also valid

from a programmatic point of view. She explained there are ways to report statistical differences and indicate its significance, but that the error band is wider with smaller groups. If “near mastery” is the focus, then the standard could be set at that performance level. She said there is some flexibility in relation to school size and achievement levels. The expectation for a higher achieving school is that they would have a higher number of students achieving “mastery” level, but the school with more disadvantaged student population would have greater educational needs. She explained there will be good information explaining the data included on the school’s website so those accessing it can understand how to interpret the data.

Ms. Kathleen Leatham, President, Davis Education Association, stated that she has found the data shown on the reports important and helpful to her as a teacher. The point gains are also helpful. She stated it might be helpful to report “above mastery” gains as well.

Ms. Wendy Bromley, President, Jordan Education Association, expressed concern that if the data are too simple, it could reflect negatively on a school. Parents and the public should be fully informed about all aspect’s of a school report card.

Ms. Phyllis Sorensen, President, Utah Education Association (UEA) stated that it is critical that teachers be trained to interpret the scores so they can explain them to parents and also know how to utilize scores in their classroom curriculum.

Ms. Kaye Chatterton stated that high performing schools have few programs that meet the needs of higher achieving students, who also should be able to make gains.

Dr. Lawrence stated that if the number of students in any given group are too small, they are not reported. The needs of students should be addressed through a school plan.

Jill Kennedy cautioned against making it difficult, even impossible, for higher achieving schools to challenge higher achieving students.

Dr. Lawrence noted that they should soon be able to apply existing data to the report, making it more significant and useful to a district or school. It will allow them to consider impact. The State Office of Education’s plan is to study past data, provide it to schools, train them on how to use that data, and then get their feedback.

Mr. Howe noted that November 30, 2003 is the date for the first school level printed copy reporting under the new statute, but that current school report cards will stay in effect until that date.

Linda Ogden stated that schools should have improvement plans that are reviewed by their

district, who then makes application for the needed funding.

Dr. Lawrence suggested that teacher recognition should be something other than monetary.

It was suggested that the report card prototypes, as being developed by the Utah State Office of Education, be made available at the UEA convention to solicit feedback from teachers.

Mr. Howe displayed another graphical representation reporting option that could indicate a school's progress over time, especially a school with a high percentage of students achieving mastery.

3. Review of Statutory Requirements (Subsection 53A-1-605(2)(b)) To Identify and Assist Schools Not Achieving State Established Acceptable Levels of Student Performance

Mr. Howe reviewed choices for establishing an "acceptable level of performance" for schools, as required under HB 177. He stated if the task force did not want to proceed by establishing an acceptable standard level, that the language in the statute should be deleted. If they do, he asked who should establish it and what should be the role of the task force. Should schools or students be the focus of those acceptable levels? What components should be used and how should the components be weighted? Other questions to be answered are: should student groups be disaggregated and how many years of data should be used?

Rep. Morgan stated there are still students not being helped, even when a majority of the schools is achieving "mastery" levels. She suggested that additional funding be provided according to the number of students that need help.

Sen. Poulton said that all schools have unique local circumstances that the legislature does not understand. Schools should be given the first opportunity to correct any problems that the assessments and reporting may show. Rather than automatically giving resources, when they might not be needed, the best approach would be to grant maximum school level flexibility to solve the problems identified in the reports. Most schools can solve nearly all problems on their own.

Rep. Pace asked if the task force should begin to make some of the decisions outlined in the decision tree document.

Sen. Stephenson questioned if it would be better for the task force to wait until the Utah State Office of Education has had the opportunity to review the decision tree document and then report to the task force at its next meeting. He noted that the task force chairs are not predisposed to spend task force time on the issue of grading schools. While there are some legislators and members of the public who are interested in pursuing this option, it is the chairs

sense that most members of the task force are not. Given that, it would probably be an unproductive use of the task force's time to consider this issue.

Sen. Poulton said that he has been undecided on the issue of grading schools for some time, but that he now believes it would be valuable for schools, parents, and teachers. Grading would help schools focus on improving basic skills. However, if it is done improperly, grading can result in negative outcomes for schools. The task force should spend time talking about this issue. There is a strong desire in the legislature to have some type of grading system. However, it needs to be fair, progressive, and help students. It should not be for labeling or punitive purposes.

Sen. Stephenson said that it is only a matter of time, given the new reports that will be distributed, before someone takes all of this data and develops some type of grading system for schools. It is important that this happen in a positive and not a harmful way.

Ila Rose Fife asked for the reasoning behind a grading system. Why do the proponents feel that such a system is necessary?

Sen. Stephenson stated that while he cannot speak for everyone, he believes that stronger improvements are possible under a grading system. Schools are more likely to focus time and attention on the areas of concern. Simply having one level of "acceptable" or "not acceptable" is not adequate. Also, simply reporting a school's raw test scores is not meaningful.

Ms. Wendy Bromley said that it is too simplistic to apply a grade that has no meaning. While a grading system may be "catchy," there are too many important factors that will be left out of any grading system. These systems might be punitive rather than leading to better education in the classroom.

Rep. Shurtliff said that a system of improvement where schools submit plans on how to raise performance would be just as effective as a grading system. Once a school is identified as "failing" it would be hard to remove this stigma.

Sen. Poulton said that the establishment of some type of letter-grading system for schools is inevitable. Does the task force want to do this in a positive way or let some other organization do it in a bad way? The task force should retain some type of control. This is a critical issue.

Rep. Pace said that there are lots of ways to view grading. Even if the State Office of Education were to develop some type of system to establish an "acceptable level of performance," not everyone would agree. The task force should rely on the experts. Also, in the testimony that

the task force heard last month from Lily Eskelson, it was clear some students would be left behind in a concerted effort to focus solely on academics.

Sen. Stephenson said that the task force should remember the various ways that classroom teachers give grades – some grade on a strict curve, others on an absolute scale. Different teachers give various weight to different factors. Teachers grade students and nothing is absolute. As a state, we have strictly guarded a classroom teacher's right to assign grades as he or she sees fit. It is important to remember that with the data that is going to be publically reported, grades will be applied by someone.

Senator Hale said that the legislature can't control what other groups are going to do. Even if the legislature does develop a grading system, it will not stop other groups from developing a different system. Grading stigmatizes schools and neighborhoods. This is something very difficult, and it makes little sense to continue the conversation.

Jill Kennedy recommended that the task force should hear the report from the State Office of Education and then decide on its future direction.

Phyllis Sorensen said that it is important that the task force develop some type of recommendation, either supporting or opposing grading. The task force has worked very hard and has always been willing to listen and to conduct a thorough review of the issues. Other groups would not do as good a job as the task force could do. Governor Leavitt has said that accountability of schools is just one part of school success. Students and parents also play a role. The legislature also has a role in providing adequate resources, textbooks, and supplies.

4. Other Business –

Sen. Stephenson noted that the task force is scheduled as a presenter at the Utah Education Association (UEA) Convention. He encouraged all members of the task force to become involved in the presentation. The workshop is scheduled for Thursday, October 5, 2000 – 3:10 to 4:20 p.m. – Room 151G Salt Palace Convention Center. He announced the next task force meeting will be held on Monday, October 9, 2000 at 8:30 a.m., Room 223 State Capitol.

MOTION: Sen. Hale moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

